Illustrations and Reflections

ON

THE STORY OF

Saul's consulting the Witch of Endor.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED

AT WEST-SPRINGFIELD.

By JOSEPH LATHROP, D.D.
Paſtor of the firſt Church in ſaid Town.

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I. SAMUEL xxviii. 6, 7.

And when Saul enquired of the LORD, *the* LORD *anſwered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then ſaid Saul unto his ſervants, Seek me a woman, that hath a familiar ſpirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his ſervants ſaid to him, Behold there is a woman that hath a familiar ſpirit at Endor.*

THE great and fundamental principles of religion, the exiſtence and unity of the godhead, were taught, as ſoon as man was placed on the earth. Nor does it appear, that, in any part of the antediluvian age, corrupt as mankind then were, these principles were rejected, or polytheiſm and idolatry admitted.

The firſt idolatry of which we have an account, was in the days of Abraham. He was commanded by God to depart from his country and from his kindred and from his father's houſe, and to go into the land of Canaan, where, God promiſed, that he would bleſs him, give him an inheritance and make of him a great nation. The reaſon of this command is aſſigned by Joſhua. He ſays to the tribes of Iſrael, "Thus ſaith the Lord, your fathers dwelt on the other ſide of the flood," the Euphrates, "in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nachor, and they ſerved other gods; and I took your father Abraham from the other ſide of the flood, and led him through all the land of Canaan."

Abraham was called from his native land into Canaan, that he might eſcape the ſuperſtitions of his countrymen, might know and worſhip the one true God, might train up his children in pure and pious ſentiments and manners, and might thus lay a foundation in his own family for the continuance and ſpread of true religion in the world.

Thoſe nations, which, renouncing the one ſu-

preme God, ſerved gods many and lords many, generally admitted the deluſive arts of divination, magic and ſorcery, which were pretenſions to immediate intercourse with inviſible beings, or to a profound and occult knowledge of nature, by which they boaſted to have learned important ſecrets, undiſcoverable by the ordinary wiſdom and ſagacity of man.

These arts were conducted with ſubtile artifice and crafty contrivance, with pompous rites and oſtentatious ceremonies, with the colluſion of two or more confederates, and with a certain legerdemain or ſlight of hand, to amuſe and deceive the ignorant and credulous. The reſponſes made by the pretended oracles were uttered in ſuch ambiguous terms, as to admit the application of contrary events.

Theſe deluſive arts, we find, were much practiſed and highly eſteemed in Egypt, during the time that the Jews ſojourned in that country.

The Jews, tho' inſtructed in the character and government of one ſupreme God, yet by long reſidence in Egypt, had fallen into a belief of the reality, and a fondneſs for the exerciſe of ſuch arts. There were ſome ſo impious as to profeſs the knowledge of them, and many ſo credulous as to conſult theſe wicked pretenders. Againſt this dangerous propenſity, God, in the conſtitution of their religion and government, took early care to guard them. He gave them a written law preſcribing the great rules of their duty to himſelf and to one another. The law was communicated in ſuch a manner as tended to impreſs them with a belief of the exiſtence, and a reverence for the majeſty of one all-perfect Deity. It was introduced with great ſolemnity. "Hear, O Iſrael, the Lord our God is one Lord." And the firſt precept is, "Thou ſhalt have no other gods before me."

This law expreſsly forbids all kinds of divination and ſorcery, and all application to thoſe who practiſe ſuch arts. "There ſhall not be found among

you any one that uſeth divination, or an obſerver of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a conſulter with familiar ſpirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do theſe things are an abomination to the Lord; and becauſe of theſe abominations the Lord driveth out the nations which were before you. They hearkened unto diviners and obſervers of times; but as for thee the Lord thy God hath not ſuffered thee to do ſo."

God alſo gave them prophets, who, being endued with his own ſpirit, could occaſionally inſtruct them in all things neceſſary to be known, which were not communicated in the written revelation. And theſe prophets were enabled to give clear and undeniable proofs of their divine commiſſion.

Beſides theſe, there was the oracle of Urim and Thummim, from which the high prieſt gave divine anſwers to thoſe, who religiouſly conſulted him on great and national concerns. And theſe anſwers were given in a public manner, in open day, and with an audible voice, ſo that there could be no ſuſpicion of fraud and impoſture.

Notwithſtanding all theſe precautions, thoſe arts ſtill exiſted. And in the reign of Saul, they had become more common, than in former times. And Saul, probably by the advice of Samuel, who had conſiderable influence upon the king, "had put away thoſe who had familiar ſpirits and the wizards out of the land."

After the death of Samuel, the Philiſtines, encouraged probably by the removal of that great and good man, made war upon Iſrael, and collected a numerous army to invade the country. Saul gathered an army to oppoſe them. The two armies encamped in ſight of each other. Saul, viewing the hoſt of the Philiſtines, "was greatly afraid, and his heart trembled." In his terror and perplexity, "he enquired of the Lord." In the book of Chronicles it is ſaid "He enquired *not* of the Lord." He made a pretence of enquiring of the Lord; but did

not enquire in that humble, penitent and perſevering manner, which God required, and which would have entitled him to an anſwer.

In this embarraſsment, Saul ſaid to his ſervants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar ſpirit, that I may go to her and enquire of her," concerning the event of the impending battle. Strange inconſiſtency! He had put away thoſe who had familiar ſpirits; and now he would conſult a creature of this deſcription himſelf. Since God would not anſwer him, he determined that, contrary to the command of God, he would try if he could not get an anſwer from a witch. But God had departed from him: And what abſurdity can be too great for a man, that is forſaken of God?

The ſervants inform him of a woman to his mind, who lived in Endor, a place not far diſtant from Gilboa, where he now was. That he might not be diſcovered by the Philiſtines, nor ſuſpected by the woman, "he diſguiſed himſelf, and put on other raiment;" and in this diſguiſe he went in the night with two ſervants to Endor to conſult the enchantreſs.

Having arrived at her reſidence, he ſoon opened his buſineſs. "I pray thee," ſays he, "divine unto me by the familiar ſpirit, and bring me up him, whom I ſhall name unto thee." See here another inſtance of inconſiſtency in the man. He had no idea, that the woman, by her familiar ſpirit, could foretel what he wanted to know, the event of the battle, or could inſtruct him how to inſure ſucceſs; yet he imagined, that by her incantations ſhe could raiſe the dead, which, if there is a difference, is a greater inſtance of power.

The woman did not yet ſuſpect her queriſt to be the king; for he was in diſguiſe; it was night; if ſhe had ever ſeen him, yet ſhe would not now be apt to think of him; ſhe would not imagine, that a *king* could be ſo weak and credulous as to conſult an ignorant ſorcereſs, or ſo inconſiſtent as to apply to a

perſon of her character after his ſevere orders to exterminate ſuch creatures. She therefore, by way of excuſe from undertaking the buſineſs refers him to what Saul had done, and expreſſed to him a ſuſpicion, that he was a deſigning man, who came to lay a ſnare for her life.

When Saul had given her the aſſurance of an oath, that no puniſhment ſhould happen to her, ſhe expreſſed a readineſs to comply with his requeſt. In that day an oath was deemed ample ſecurity for the fidelity of him that made it.

Saul had propoſed, that ſhe ſhould bring up to him ſuch a perſon, as he would name to her. She now aſks, "Whom ſhall I bring up to thee?" He anſwered, "Bring me up Samuel." The hag certainly had no expectation, that ſhe could bring up Samuel, or any body elſe. She could not be ſo vain as to imagine, that ſhe poſſeſſed a power to raiſe the dead, and to raiſe whom ſhe pleaſed, and when ſhe pleaſed. But probably ſhe intended to amuſe and ſatisfy her conſulter, by the aſſiſtance of a familiar, or accomplice who from ſome ſecret cell, ſhould give reſponſes, as coming from the mouth of Samuel.

When ſhe began her ſpells, a figure appeared which reſembled Samuel. And ſhe was horribly affrighted. "She cried with a loud voice." The appearance was wholly unexpected to her. She had no idea, that her incantations would produce and effect like this. The ſight of Samuel, who had long been a councellor to Saul, brought the king to her mind. She ſaid, "Why haſt thou deceived me? for thou art Saul." The king endeavors to calm her ſpirits. He ſays, "Be not afraid. What ſaweſt thou?" She had a ſight of the object before Saul had. He, perceiving that ſhe was terrified at ſomething, enquired, what ſhe ſaw. She anſwered, "I ſaw gods aſcending out of the earth." The word rendered *gods*, though plural in form, is often ſingular in ſenſe. It is in ſcripture applied not only to the ſupreme Deity, but to a magiſtrate, a judge, or a man of eminence,

ſuch as Samuel was. Saul underſtands the woman as ſpeaking of a ſingle perſon, and aſks, "What form is he of?" She ſays, "An old man cometh up, and he is covered with a mantle." By this time, Saul had a ſight of the apparition. "And when he *perceived*, that it was Samuel, he ſtooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himſelf."

It hence appears, that Saul *ſaw* the object; for he would not have bowed himſelf to a mere idea, or imagination in his own mind.

A queſtion will naturally ariſe here, whether this apparition was really *Samuel*, or a mere phantom, and illuſion on the ſenſes? The ſacred hiſtorian ſays, it was *Samuel*, and gives no intimation of its being a ſpectre.

The ſouls of men exiſt in a ſeparate ſtate. They may be ſent into this world in bodies and habits reſembling thoſe, in which they appeared before their death. Angels, in ancient times, came to men in human forms and converſed with them in human language. Human ſpirits may have been ſent in the ſame manner on particular occaſions. There is no more difficulty in ſuppoſing, that Samuel was raiſed and exhibited in his former habit, than that Moſes and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration. The apparition's diſcourſe to Saul is ſuch as we might expect from the prophet; but in no reſpect ſuch as the ſorcereſs would have put into the mouth of a ſpectre, which ſhe had conjured up. The apparition predicts certain events, which were to be fulfilled in a day or two. The events actually came to paſs. And they were events which neither the woman, nor an evil ſpirit could foreknow; ſuch as the death of Saul and of his three ſons, and the defeat of his army. Iſaiah thus challenges all falſe gods; "Let them bring forth and ſhew us what ſhall happen. Let them declare the things, which ſhall be hereafter, that we may know that they are gods." Here is a plain declaration, that none but the true God can foretel thoſe events, which depend on the volitions

and actions of men. If we ſhould ſuppoſe, that, to amuſe Saul, the woman ventured on ſome bold conjectures, we muſt ſuppoſe, that like other impoſtors, ſhe would predict good, and not evil. Had ſhe promiſed ſucceſs, ſhe had nothing to fear. If ſucceſs followed, ſhe might hope Saul would reward her. If he ſhould be defeated and ſlain in battle, he could not hurt her. But a prediction of diſaſter and death might be conſidered as an evidence of diſaffection and malice; and, had it failed, it would certainly have expoſed her to the king's reſentment.

But if Samuel really appeared, was he raiſed by this witch's incantations?

This cannot be ſuppoſed; for, as we have already obſerved, ſhe had no ſuch power, nor had her charms any ſuch tendency, nor had ſhe any ſuch expectation. But Samuel was ſent by the power of God, that Saul, in his own way, and by the very perſon whom he wiſhed to ſee, might be reproved for his paſt wickedneſs, and warned of the deſtruction which awaited him. His impious application to this vile creature to bring him up Samuel, was the crime which principally provoked againſt him the awful ſentence, which Samuel denounced. The requeſt of Saul, God anſwered in his anger, as he did the requeſt of Iſrael, when he gave Saul to be their king. "Saul died for his tranſgreſſion, which he committed againſt the Lord, even againſt the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and alſo for aſking counſel of one that had a familiar ſpirit to enquire of it, and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he ſlew him, and turned the kingdom to David." And the ſtory is recorded to teach men, how criminal, and how dangerous it is to depart from God, and to ſeek the knowledge of future events, or of any ſecret things, by conſulting diviners, or by any means which reaſon and ſcripture do not warrant.

The converſation, which enſued between Samuel

and the king is ſolemn and intereſting, and confirms the obſervations which we have made.

Samuel ſaid to Saul, "Why haſt thou diſquieted me to bring me up?" The ſaint feels no real diſquietude in executing any beheſt, on which God ſends him. But Samuel ſpeaks after the manner of mortals, who are diſquieted, when their repoſe is interrupted. Death is compared to ſleep, and the reſurrection to awaking out of ſleep. As to be prematurely awaked from profound ſleep is a painful diſquietude, ſo Samuel ſpeaks as if he had been diſquieted by an unſeaſonable revocation into this world.

Saul anſwered, "I am ſore diſtreſſed; for the Philiſtines make war upon me, and God is departed from me." A diſtreſſing caſe indeed. Affliction is in itſelf diſtreſſing; and in it the only relief and conſolation is the preſence of God, the ſupport of his grace, the light of his countenance, acceſs to his throne and a conſciouſneſs of his approbation. If when trouble is near, God is afar off, trouble will preſs with all its weight, and the ſoul will ſink under it. "God is departed from me, and anſwereth me not; therefore have I called thee, that thou mayſt make known to me, what I ſhall do." Samuel ſaid, "Wherefore then doſt thou aſk of me, ſeeing God is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" What are creatures without God? "If he withdraw not his anger, the proud helpers ſtoop under him." Neither men nor angels can do more for us, than God allows and enables them to do. To forſake God, and provoke his departure from us, and then in our diſtreſs to ſeek relief from man, or from any other creature, and eſpecially from a witch, is adding madneſs to impiety. Samuel proceeds; "The Lord hath done to him," i. e. to David, who is mentioned at the end of the verſe, "the Lord hath done to him, as he ſpake by me; for he hath rent the kingdom from thine hand, and given it to David. Becauſe thou obeyedſt not the voice of the

Lord, therefore he hath done this thing to thee this day. Moreover the Lord will deliver Iſrael with thee into the hand of the Philiſtines, and tomorrow," i.e. in a ſhort time, " thou and thy ſons ſhall be with me ;" ſhall be in the ſtate of the dead. Such pious and ſolemn reproofs and warnings, and ſuch minute and particular predictions to be immediately verified, cannot be ſuppoſed to come from wicked ſpirits, or from a vile woman under their influence. They muſt have proceeded from God, who alone knew what ſhould be on the morrow. And if they proceeded from God, it is more pious, and more rational to ſuppoſe, that he communicated them by the mouth of Samuel ſent from heaven, than by the voice or agency of an evil ſpirit iſſuing from the infernal regions.

The ſtory, which we have been illuſtrating, will ſuggeſt to us ſome uſeful inſtructions.

1. It teaches us the ſeparate exiſtence of the ſoul after death, and affords a proof of the reſurrection of the body.

If Samuel, after his death, was really ſent to the king of Iſrael, clothed in a body ſimilar to that in which he lived on earth, then the ſoul ſurvives the death of the body, and may again be united to it. This appearance of Samuel, the tranſlation of Enoch and Elijah, and the viſit of Elijah and Moſes to Chriſt and his diſciples on the mount, were ſenſible verifications of the doctrine of a future ſtate, which doctrine was taught by Moſes and the prophets, and is more clearly brought to light by the goſpel. Hence alſo we may,

2*dly*. Infer, that the ſpirits of pious men were formerly, and may be ſtill, on ſome occaſions, employed as miniſters of God's providence in this world.

The angels, we are told, are miniſtring ſpirits. Many inſtances of their miniſtry are related in ſcripture. And tho' their miniſtry has chiefly been em-

ployed for the heirs of ſalvation, yet it has ſometimes been vouchſafed to men of an oppoſite character, when they acted in a public capacity. An angel was ſent to withſtand Balaam in his way, reprove his perverſeneſs and inſtruct him in the will of God. And if the ſpirits of juſt men are, as our ſavior teaches us, made equal to the angels, it is reaſonable to conclude, that they are honored with the ſame employments. The appearance of Samuel to Saul, and of Moſes and Elijah to Chriſt and his diſciples, confirm this concluſion.

3. The ſtory warns us of the guilt and danger, which we incur, when we take indirect meaſures to learn the ſecrets of providence, and the events of futurity.

Saul, by applying to a ſorcereſs, that he might know the iſſue of an approaching battle, brought on himſelf a ſentence of death from the mouth of a divine meſſenger.

If we believe, that there is a being of perfect wiſdom, power and goodneſs, who made and governs the world, and directs and overrules all events, we need be ſolicitous only to know and do his will; and in well doing we may commit our ſouls and all our intereſts to him, as to a faithful creator and kind preſerver. Our duty we may know from the revelation, which he has given us. The few events, which it concerns us to foreknow, we may learn from experience, and from the ſteady courſe of providence. But events, which depend on the voluntary actions of other men, or on the unknown operations of providence, we have no means, and ſhould have no curioſity to learn; but ſhould humbly leave them to him, who works all things according to the counſel of his will, and without whoſe inſpection a ſparrow falls not to the ground.

There were, in former ages, and there have been in modern times, ſome who pretended, by a power of divination, or by ſkill in occult ſciences, to fore-

tel men's fortune in life, and the good or ill ſucceſs of their enterpriſes, to diſcover loſt or ſtolen goods wherever depoſited, and to point out by deſcription the authors of theft, arſon, murder and other miſchiefs, however ſecretly committed.

It may poſſibly be a queſtion with ſome, whether it can be lawful or reaſonable to conſult ſuch perſons for information in matters of this kind.

(1.) In the firſt place, it is certain that men cannot acquire this knowledge by any regular art, or by any natural ſagacity. Such ſecrets are not ſubject to human calculation. There are no given principles in nature, on which a calculation can be grounded. The greateſt philoſophers, aſtronomers and mathematicians have pretended to no ſuch occult ſcience, but have diſclaimed it as falſe. The pretenders to it have generally been people of indifferent education, and often of worſe morals.

If then any poſſeſs this kind of knowledge, it muſt be imparted to them by an inviſible being. But who is this being? Not the Deity, or a good ſpirit inſtructed and ſent by him; for then the communications would be infallible; whereas now, we know, they are often fallacious. Beſides; we well know, that miracles, prophecy, inſpiration and ſupernatural knowledge have long ſince ceaſed, as the apoſtle has foretold they would do, being no longer neceſſary, after the written revelation is completed. And while they exiſted, they were given to be applied, not to trivial purpoſes, to little perſonal concerns, to the gratification of vain curioſity, but to the grand intereſt of religion, and to objects of public and national conſequence.

Hence then it follows, that theſe revealers of ſecrets, if they in any caſe, poſſeſs the knowledge to which they pretend, muſt derive it from an evil ſource.

Infernal ſpirits, who are roaming about in the world, may doubtleſs have a knowledge of ſome

things, which are not generally known to mortals. And tho' they have not a foreknowledge of the unrevealed purpoſes of providence, yet, from their natural ſubtilty and long experience, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that, in ſome caſes, they can make more ſhrewd conjectures concerning future occurrences, than men can ordinarily make. And it is not doubted, but that, in ſome way or other, they can ſuggeſt to the human mind many thoughts, which would not have ariſen ſpontaneouſly. Now when men addict themſelves to divination as a trade and profeſſion, as well as when they purſue any other wicked courſe, they lay themſelves open to the influence of evil ſpirits, become in a peculiar manner ſuſceptible of ſuggeſtions from them, and are, perhaps without any conſciouſneſs or ſuſpicion of their own, led captive by them at their will. And tho' theſe diabolical ſuggeſtions frequently prove fallacious, yet, if in a few inſtances they ſhould be verified in fact, theſe few would be ſufficient to keep up the credit of the diviner and his pretended art; beſure among weak and credulous people; for the failures are ſeldom mentioned and ſoon forgotten; but the verifications are often related and long remembered.

That diviners, in ancient times, were aſſiſted by an evil ſpirit, is manifeſt from ſcripture. The ſorcerer in Paphos is called, for miſchief and ſubtilty, "a child of the devil." The damſel at Philippi, who brought to her maſters much gain by ſoothſaying, was actuated by "a ſpirit of divination;" and Paul in the name of the Lord Jeſus commanded this ſpirit to come out of her." St John ſpeaks of certain "unclean ſpirits, the ſpirits of devils, which go forth and work miracles;" or enable deceivers to do and tell ſtrange things, which among credulous people paſs for miracles. Moſes ſays to the Jews, "If there ariſe among you a prophet or dreamer, and give thee a ſign or wonder, and the ſign or wonder come to paſs, ſaying, Let us go and ſerve other gods, thou

ſhalt not hearken to him." It is here ſuppoſed, that a falſe prophet may ſhew a ſign, and the ſign may happen to come to paſs. He may by chance, or by the ſuggeſtion of the devil, now and then foretel an event, which will follow. The father of lies will tell the truth, as far as he knows it, when truth is neceſſary to eſtabliſh the credit of his agent, and increaſe his influence in deceiving and corrupting men. But ſuch a prophet, tho' his ſign ſhould come to paſs, is to be rejected as a vile impoſtor, becauſe he is enticing men away from the ſervice of God. No ſign or wonder can juſtify men in hearkening to ſuch an enticer.

If the profeſſed revealers of ſecrets, ſo far as they have a knowledge of the ſecrets which they pretend to reveal, muſt derive it from infernal ſuggeſtion, then plainly we ought never to conſult them in this character, for this is indirectly to conſult the devil; and it is directly to encourage a profeſſion, which every friend to religion and ſociety ought to deteſt and reprobate.

(2.) The uſe of ſuch pretended arts, and intercourſe with thoſe who uſe them are, as expreſsly, as any other crime, forbidden in ſcripture. Moſes, enumerating, under various names, the pretenders to occult ſcience, tells the Jews, that God did not allow any ſuch perſons to be found among them, nor ſuffer any to *hearken* to ſuch perſons, if they were found. This prohibition reſpects us under the goſpel, as well as the Jews. For Moſes immediately adds, "A prophet ſhall the Lord your God raiſe up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: To *him* ſhall ye hearken." "This prophet," the writers of the New Teſtament tell us, is CHRIST. And hearkening unto this prophet is oppoſed to hearkening unto diviners and obſervers of times.

In the writings of the prophets and apoſtles all kinds of ſorcery, magic and witchcraft are interdicted and condemned, as contrary to true religion;

and conſequently all application to the profeſſors of theſe arts is utterly diſallowed. When Paul preached the goſpel in Epheſus, " Many, who had uſed curious arts," being converted to the faith, " came and confeſſed their evil deeds, and brought their books together and burned them before all men."

(3.) God only can look into futurity and unfold the ſecret events of his providence. If we acknowledge any creature, viſible or inviſible, as having an independent power to open the volume of futurity, and diſcloſe its ſecret contents, to that creature we aſcribe a diſtinguiſhing prerogative of Deity.

By giving credit to diviners and conjurers we diſhonor and ſet at nought the revelation of God ; for we introduce other revelations, as teaching things, which this has not taught ; and by receiving and obeying them, we pay the ſame deference and reſpect to them, as to this. What if the diviner ſhould tell you, to ſerve other Gods—to renounce the bible—to reject ſome of its doctrines and precepts ? Will you hearken to him ſtill ? Where will you ſtop ? Stop where you are. Reject all commerce with him in his wicked profeſſion. This is what your bible requires.

It was by magical incantations and artificial tricks that ſome deceivers in the apoſtles' times, endeavored to obſtruct the progreſs of the goſpel. And if ſuch men can obtain credit and countenance, why will they not do the ſame at any time ? Paul ſpeaking of evil men and ſeducers, ſays, " They reſiſt the truth, as the magicians withſtood Moſes." The conjurer in Paphos, full of all guile and ſubtilty, " ſought by his ſorcery to turn away believers from the faith." Such was the danger from this ſort of men, that the apoſtle gives a particular caution to the believers in Epheſus, " that they be not carried about by the *ſleight* of men, and *cunning craftineſs*, wherewith they lie in wait to deceive." Simon, a ſorcerer in Samaria, " giving out that he was ſome great man, and

poſſeſſed a mighty power from God, *bewitched* the people with his ſorceries. Some of the Jewiſh prieſts, pretending to ſkill in magic, made uſe of their wicked arts to detach believers from the purity of the goſpel. Alluding to ſuch impoſtors, Paul ſays to the Chriſtians in Galatia, " O fooliſh Galatians, who hath *bewitched* you, that ye ſhould not obey the truth.

(4.) Hearkening to diviners tends, not only to deſtroy religion, but to diſſolve our mutual confidence and ſubvert our ſocial ſecurity.

Let us ſuppoſe that people generally give credit to ſuch perſons ; and then ſee what will be the conſequence. A caſualty happens, or ſome miſchief is done in our neighborhood ; a barn is burned, or a man is miſſing, poſſibly dead, or property is loſt. We know not how ; but we ſuſpect, it is done by ſome deſigning villain. We diſpatch a meſſenger to the conjurer. What is the moral character of this conjurer, we know not, nor do we much care. It is not the man, but the conjurer with whom we are now concerned. If we cannot truſt him in any other capacity , yet we can truſt him in this. The meſſenger goes and opens his buſineſs ; an anſwer is given importing, that the miſchief was perpetrated by a certain man of ſuch a deſcription. We think of ſomebody, to whom the deſcription, with a little help of imagination, will ſuit tolerably well. Or perhaps the meſſenger has an enemy whom he ſuſpects, and prejudice will eaſily modify the picture ſo as to repreſent him. A hint is given—it is thrown into circulation—it gains credit ; and an honeſt man is ruined. Thus divination, when it is held in general repute, puts it in every man's power to deſtroy every man, whom he will.

Why do you wiſh to know the author of a miſchief which has been done ? You will ſay, You wiſh the villain may be puniſhed, the injury repaired, and evil prevented. Very well : Then take the proper ſteps to detect and arreſt the offender. If a conjurer points out ſuch, or ſuch a perſon, as the criminal, he may indeed gratify your curioſity, and per-

haps your malice ; but he does no good to ſociety. His ſuggeſtion is not evidence, on which the ſuppoſed perpetrator can be convicted. If it was, no mortal would be ſafe. You perhaps believe the inſinuation, and you make others believe it. But when the general ſuſpicion falls on an innocent man, inveſtigation ſtops ; this innocent man ſuffers the reproach, and the really guilty lies unſuſpected, and eſcapes unpuniſhed. And when a new miſchief happens, the same ſcene may be acted over again.

On ſocial, therefore, as well as on religious principles, theſe diviners ought to be proſecuted rather than encouraged—to be puniſhed rather than patronized. Judge Blackſtone ſays, that " pretending to tell fortunes, and to diſcover ſtolen goods by ſkill in the occult ſciences, is a miſdemeanor, deſervedly puniſhed by law." The reaſon why it deſerves puniſhment is, becauſe it not only tends to ſubvert religion but alſo to diſturb the peace of ſociety, and deſtroy the reputation and ſecurity of every virtuous member.

There is one uſe more, which we will make of this ſtory

4. Some of the reaſons againſt conſulting diviners will apply to ſuperſtitious interpretations of unuſual ſights and noiſes, remarkable dreams and extraordinary impreſſions. By them nothing is revealed, and from them nothing can be learned. They are neither injunctions of duty, nor prognoſtics of events. An undue regard to them expoſes us to groundleſs terrors and dangerous deluſions, and weakens our faith in God.

The prophet cautions the captive Jews, that they " learn not the way of the heathen, nor be diſmayed at the ſigns of heaven, as the heathen were," who from comets, meteors and the aſpects of the planets predicted calamitous events, and thus excited conſternation in themſelves and others.

The ſtrange ſounds and appearances, by which people are ſometimes affrighted, doubtleſs proceed from ſome natural cauſe, which might, in moſt inſtances, be diſcovered by calm enquiry. But whether the cauſe be inveſtigated or not, ſo much is

certain, they point out to us no new duty, and inform us of no particular event. If they ſuggeſt to us the thought of death, or bring this thought more cloſely to our minds, very well. Let us entertain the thought and be excited by it to ſtand daily prepared for all events, which may await us in this changing world. But let us not yield to a diſmay, which would unfit us for the duties, and incapacitate us for the enjoyments of life.

"Dreams come thro' the multitude of buſineſs." They are the caſual and incoherent aſſociations of thoughts and images, which had occurred in our waking hours. Or if we ſuppoſe, that they may ſometimes be ſuggeſtions from inviſible ſpirits, ſtill what ſhall we make of them? We have no rule in reaſon or ſcripture by which to interpret them, and therefore they teach nothing, and forebode nothing. But if a *good* thought ariſes in ſleep, whether by caſualty or ſuggeſtion, let us make a good uſe of it, when we are awake. It is never the worſe for coming in a dream. If it be of a moral tendency, we may improve it to a moral purpoſe. But we are never to turn a dream into a precept or prophecy; for thus we ſubſtitute it in the place of ſcripture, and expoſe ourſelves to dangerous ſeductions and endleſs deluſions. Among the deceivers who had crept into the Chriſtian church, St. Jude mentions "*Dreamers*, who defiled the fleſh, deſpiſed dominion and ſpake evil of dignities." By pretending to revelations in dreams, and by perſuading others to confide in theſe pretended communications, they ſubverted the doctrines of the goſpel, broke the bands of ſociety, and opened a door to licentiouſneſs.

An impreſſion on the imagination when we are awake, has no more authority, than a ſuggeſtion when we are aſleep. The impreſſion, however ſtrong, is not to be obeyed implicitly as a certain dictate of heaven, but to be examined ſeriouſly, whether it accords to ſcripture, and tends to virtue. If a ſacred truth, or religious obligation be deeply impreſſed on the mind, let us take the benefit of ſuch an

impreſſion by obeying the truth, and fulfilling the obligation. But never let us conclude that an action is right, merely becauſe we feel an unuſual inclination to do it, or that an event will befall us or our friends, merely becauſe we feel an unaccountable apprehenſion of it. This would be to expoſe ourſelves to continual terrors and temptations, to give imagination the dominion over reaſon, and to ſubſtitute our own impreſſions in the place of divine revelation.

Finally: We have great cauſe to be thankful, that God has favored us with a revelation, which contains all that we need to learn in relation to our moſt important intereſts. With this let us converſe, and this let us follow, and we ſhall be ſafe and happy. "Secret things belong to God; things which are revealed belong to us that we may do all the words of God's law." Let us be content to know what may be known, and to be ignorant of things, which cannot by known. Why would we foreſee the events, which are before us? Would we diminiſh our bleſſings, and augment our calamities by anticipation? All events God will order well; and the events which now await us, he will make known to us in the fitteſt time; and that is uſually the time when they come.

There is one event, concerning which we need no diviner to inform us. That is our own death. The event is certain; the time of it is uncertain; it is happy for us, that it is ſo. Did we know it to be diſtant, we ſhould probably become more dilatory and negligent in our duty. Did we know it to be on the morrow, we might be as much overwhelmed as was Saul. Terror might render us incapable of repentance. Or if a repentance took place in ſuch a ſituation, it might ſeem to be rather a matter of neceſſity than of choice; and the ſweet comforts of hope would be wanting. Our times are in God's hands: and in his hands let us calmly leave them. "What *our* hands find to do, let us do it with our might, for there is no work, wiſdom nor device in the grave, to which we are going."